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www.pecs.com

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Welcome from Pyramid Australia's Clinical Director, Sophie Kerr

Things at Pyramid Australia continue at break-neck speed. Since the last edition of our newsletter, we have presented workshops in Queensland, Victoria, NSW and New Zealand. Our new 'Functional ABA' workshop was very well received in Auckland. Consultations have been provided in Victoria, NSW and the NT. It is wonderful to see our students continuing to progress within their use of PECS and various other skills. Our third, and final PECS intensive of 2011 will be held in the last week of September, and we are aiming to beat the record of 90 communicative opportunities in one day set at our last intensive. I hope you enjoy all of the information included in this edition, yet another featured product and a range of articles about PECS, the Autism Victoria conference and Erin's trip to the USA. We would love to include some of our readers' Magic moments in our next edition; so please send your stories to ncullen@pecs.com

Featured Product for September

Find It Beanbag Activities

Theme-based beanbags for students to hold and explore. Each bag contains several hidden objects that encourage fine-motor manipulation and commenting. With the help from the teacher, students can poke, prod and shake the bags, and as the pellets shift, new objects are revealed in the see-through window. With each ever-changing glimpse, students can use the included Activity Board and pictures to comment on what they see. Each kit contains a beanbag made of soft velour, 15 different items in each beanbag, an Activity Board with hook Velcro® to use with the corresponding vocabulary, Sentence Starters, a large Sentence Strip™ and a detailed activity plan with expansion activities.

Find It Beanbag Activities are available in Food and Animal Themes.



Click on the link below to view this
product in our online store:

[Australian Online Store](#)
[New Zealand Online Store](#)

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Pyramid Operational Meeting – U.S.A

Erin Hobbin

Hey everyone!! I recently returned from a trip to the U.S.A. On this visit I met with Dr. Andy Bondy and Lori Frost (Developers of PECS and Pyramid) as well as the entire team from PGMSC (Pyramid Group Management Services Corporation) and the Operations Directors from Canada, Germany, U.S, France, and U.K and via web cam, Spain and Japan.

This was the first time that many of the companies had met face to face. It was a great opportunity for everyone to discuss ideas, get to know each other and to gain a real sense of working as a team around the world. After two very tiring days of meetings we caught a bus to New York City and, WOW, that place was amazing! After some sightseeing, including Times Square, Ground Zero and the Empire State Building, we decided we were all a little soaked from the rain and had a classic American meal at the famous Planet Hollywood in Times Square. This social outing brought the international team even closer and hopefully will result in us working as a much more succinct team.

I also got to spend some quality time with Amanda Reed and her puppy Inca (second cutest dog, next to mine). Amanda is enjoying living in the U.S. and working for the Management Group. She gave me a really good sense of what it's like to live as an American, taking me to places like Walmart and DSW (Designer Shoe Warehouse).

If anyone is interested to hear more about my trip or the international companies please feel free to email me, ehobbin@pecs.com.



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Autism Victoria Conference

The Victorian Autism Conference was held on 5th and 6th August, 2010. This state-wide conference was designed to give practical strategies to families and professionals working with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Sophie Kerr presented a short talk on PECS and Erin Hobbin manned an exhibition stall at the conference.

Both Erin and Sophie found the conference to be very informative for parents, careers and professionals.

Pyramid held a "Request for a free raffle ticket using PECS" competition. The winners of 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes were as follows:

1st Prize: Renata from Glen Waverly, Victoria

2nd Prize: Leanne from Prahran, Victoria

3rd Prize: Emily from Bundoora, Victoria



Upcoming PECS Intensive Programs

January 10th to 14th, 2011

April 11th to 15th, 2011

July 4th to 8th, 2011

October 3rd to 7th, 2011

Please contact Erin Hobbin at ehobbin@pecs.com or on 03 9391 6122 to register your interest.

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Autism Victoria - 1000 Books Campaign

Autism Victoria have launched the 1000 Books Campaign with the aim of increasing their library over the next 12 months by at least 1000 books.

Pyramid Australia are pleased to have had the opportunity to donate a number of our books to Autism Victoria to assist in their campaign.

Autism Victoria "looks forward to supporting even more families and individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders, as well as providing resources for professionals and interested members of the community to increase knowledge, understanding, and awareness of ASDs."

You can donate to Autism Victoria's 1000 books campaign by visiting their website at www.autismvictoria.org.au

FaHCSIA - Helping Children with Autism Package

Our Pyramid consultants have been very busy seeing many new and continuing clients since we have become an approved member of the Helping Children with Autism provider panel.

Our consultants have seen numerous children at their homes, schools and kindergartens while in their state.

Many families have used their funding to attend workshops and purchase products, while others have shown a great interest in our PECS Intensive Program.

If you are receiving intervention from another FaHCSIA approved service provider, they may purchase products using your funding on your behalf. For further information on purchasing products using your HCWA funding, please visit our [Products](#) page at www.pecs.com.

For information on the services that Pyramid offer under the HCWA package, please contact Erin Hobbin ehobbin@pecs.com or visit our [FaHCSIA Provider Info](#) page at www.pecs.com.

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✓✓✓ Full marks for PECS ✓✓✓

PECS has the highest positive rating on www.researchautism.net

Each intervention on this website is rated according to the amount and quality of scientific evidence which has been published in peer-reviewed journals that supports or does not support the effectiveness of that intervention.

You can see these interventions and their ratings at:

www.researchautism.net

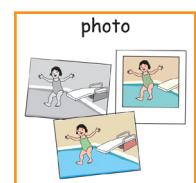
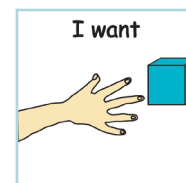
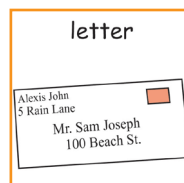
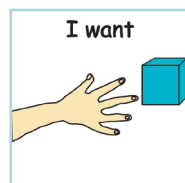
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Just click on the relevant icon in the side bar

Do you have a question, would you like advice?

Sophie will be answering a new question in each newsletter,
please send an email to Narelle at ncullen@pecs.com
if you have a question you would like answered.



We would love to hear from you! - Please send in stories, photos or
comments you would like to share in future newsletters.

**Email to: ncullen@pecs.com, or
Mail to: 3/1 Basil Street, Newport, VIC 3015**

If you have any general questions, or would like to provide feedback
about our newsletter, please contact Erin Hobbin at ehobbin@pecs.com,
or on 03 9391 6122

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Myths and Misconceptions about PECS

Sophie Kerr

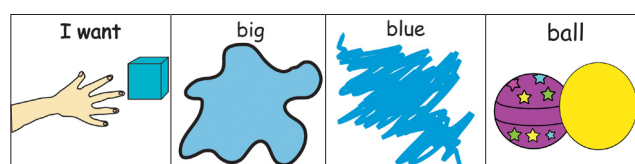
Development of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) began in 1983. The PECS provides a specific protocol for teaching individuals who have difficulties with speech, communication and/or language to expressively communicate using pictures. There are a number of myths and misconceptions surrounding PECS. It is common for any use of pictures to be labelled as PECS. Often the use of pictures to teach directions or on visual schedules is labelled PECS. While these skills are an important use of pictures, they should not be called PECS. Here this myth, along with some other common myths regarding PECS, is discussed.

Myth 1: Students need to understand what the pictures mean before beginning to use PECS

The skills taught at Phase I and II of PECS are all the rules of communication. The goal is to teach communication that is immediately useful to the student. During these lessons the communication partner will complete a reinforcer assessment and then choose the picture required for their student to make a PECS request. Research indicates that iconicity does not affect an individual's ability to learn picture use within PECS. This means that a student's ability to recognise visual stimuli will not impact on their use of PECS. If it was required that students learn the meaning of each picture prior to starting PECS, the process of learning a functional communication skill would be slowed dramatically. All of the tools required to teach the symbol set chosen are provided within the PECS protocol. When a student reaches Phase III of PECS, the consistent use of powerful reinforcers and powerfully non-preferred items, in combination with providing a minimum of 30-40 communicative opportunities per day and consistent use of the 4 step error correction will provide the right environment for the student to learn what each picture means.

Top Tips for Selecting and Creating a Picture Set

1. Choose a picture set that is readily available. The most important thing is to begin using the PECS protocol to teach functional communication.
2. A picture set that is somewhat generic (e.g. Pics for PECS line drawn and coloured pictures) provides scope for expanding on the student's language e.g. 'I want big blue ball' is only necessary if the student has a generic picture of ball. If the picture being used is a photo of the big blue ball the student will not have a need to use any additional language.



VERSUS



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Myths and Misconceptions about PECS continued....

3. Make all of the pictures in the same size. 1.5 inches squared or 2 inches squared are a great place to start with most students. Consider modifying the size of the picture used if the student has visual or fine motor issues that will cause difficulty with utilising small pictures.
4. Obey the 'Law of Laminates' when you make your pictures by following this task analysis: (Laminate only sticks to itself!!)
 - Print out pictures
 - Cut out pictures
 - Glue pictures into a laminate sheet (this way they won't slide around when you put the sheet through the laminator)
 - Laminate pictures
 - Stick Velcro to back of pictures
 - Cut out laminated pictures with a small edge (approximately 2mm) of laminate around each
 - Velcro pictures into students PECS book or storage folder

Myth 2: Using PECS will inhibit speech development

Research indicates that when PECS is taught, speech will emerge in many individuals. Rather than hindering the development of speech, PECS has been found to enhance it. Teaching individuals about communication and then providing them with opportunities (and high levels of reinforcement) for using speech, provides the ideal conditions for vocalisations to emerge and develop. Typically when an individual has developed speech to a point where it is a functional communication system for them, they will decide not to continue PECS use. While speech is one of the outcomes of using PECS, it cannot be guaranteed. For those who don't go onto develop speech, PECS provides an excellent alternative communication system and the perfect launch pad for use of high-tech speech generating devices.

Myth 3: PECS only teaches requesting

Within the PECS protocol, requesting is the first skills focused on. The simple reason for this is that most people are more motivated to communicate when they realise that communicating is an easy way to access all the things that they want. When the motivation to communicate has been established, further communication skills are taught. Phase VI of PECS focuses on teaching individuals to comment using phrases beginning with sentences starters such as 'I see...', 'I hear...', 'It's a...' and 'I smell...'. The skills learned throughout the protocol can then be used to teach additional language structures e.g. 'The cat is on the table', 'The boy is running', etc. It is possible to teach any part of language using PECS... as long as the individual learning is feeling motivated and reinforced.

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Myths and Misconceptions about PECS continued....

Myth 4: PECS is only for individuals who don't speak at all

While PECS is an incredibly successful alternative communication system for those who are completely non-vocal, it also has applications for teaching a range of individuals who do have speech. PECS can augment the development of further speech and provide the tools necessary for learning a range of communication and language skills. Some of the common uses of PECS as an augmentative system include:

1. PECS can be used to increase an individual's ability to access a broader audience. Many of our speaking students can be understood by those who live and work closely with them, but face frustration in other environments where their approximations of words or jargon are not understood. PECS can provide individuals in this situation with a support system that will allow them to deliver a message when they are not understood by others.
2. PECS can be used to teach initiation of communication. Many individuals who are able speak using excellent grammar and a wide vocabulary are only able to do so if somebody else starts the conversation. PECS can provide a means for teaching the skill of social approach and initiation of communication to these individuals.
3. PECS can also be used within the arena of language and vocabulary development. For students who speak well at a one word level, but can't seem to say even a simple sentence, PECS can assist them in expanding their use of speech. For those who have vocabulary limited to a few topics, PECS can provide the tools for learning new vocabulary.

For more information on PECS/AAC myths refer to:

Bondy, A. & Frost, L. (1998). The picture exchange communication system. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 19, 373-389.

Ganz, J. & Simpson, R. (2004). Effects on communicative requesting and speech development of the Picture Exchange Communication System in children with characteristics of autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 34, 395-409.

Romski, M (PhD) & Sevcik, R.A. (2005). Augmentative Communication and Early Intervention Myths and Realities. *Infants and Young Children*, 18(3), 174-185.

Webb, T. (1999). Look who's talking! *Special Children*, April/May.

Yoder, P. & Stone, W.(2006). Randomized comparison of two communication interventions for preschoolers with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74, 426-35.

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Upcoming Workshops

To register and pay for our workshops online, please visit our [Training](#) page at www.pecs.com. You can also register for our workshops by downloading a registration form from our [Forms & Applications](#) page, and sending it in to the Pyramid office by fax, mail or email.

Sydney*	PECS Advanced Training	14th & 15th October
Sydney*	PECS Basic Training	18th & 19th October
Melbourne	PECS Basic Training	21st & 22nd October
Melbourne	Teaching Communication Skills for Independence	25th October
Melbourne	SoSAFE! Training	26th October

* Registrations for Sydney workshops closing soon

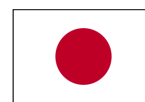
2010 Outreach Consultation Dates

Sydney: Sunday 12th September, 2010 & Saturday 16th October, 2010

For further information, please contact Erin at ehobbin@pecs.com
2011 Outreach Consultation Dates available at www.pecs.com

PECS Training Manual (Second Edition) - Translations

In addition to English, our PECS Training Manual (second edition) is available in the following languages:



Italian

French

Greek

Spanish

Japanese

Brazilian
Portuguese

Pyramid also plans to translate our PECS Training Manual into Russian, German, Arabic, Korean and Chinese in the near future.
If you would like to purchase the manual in any of the above translations, please contact ncullen@pecs.com